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# Five Poems (Poet and Critic)

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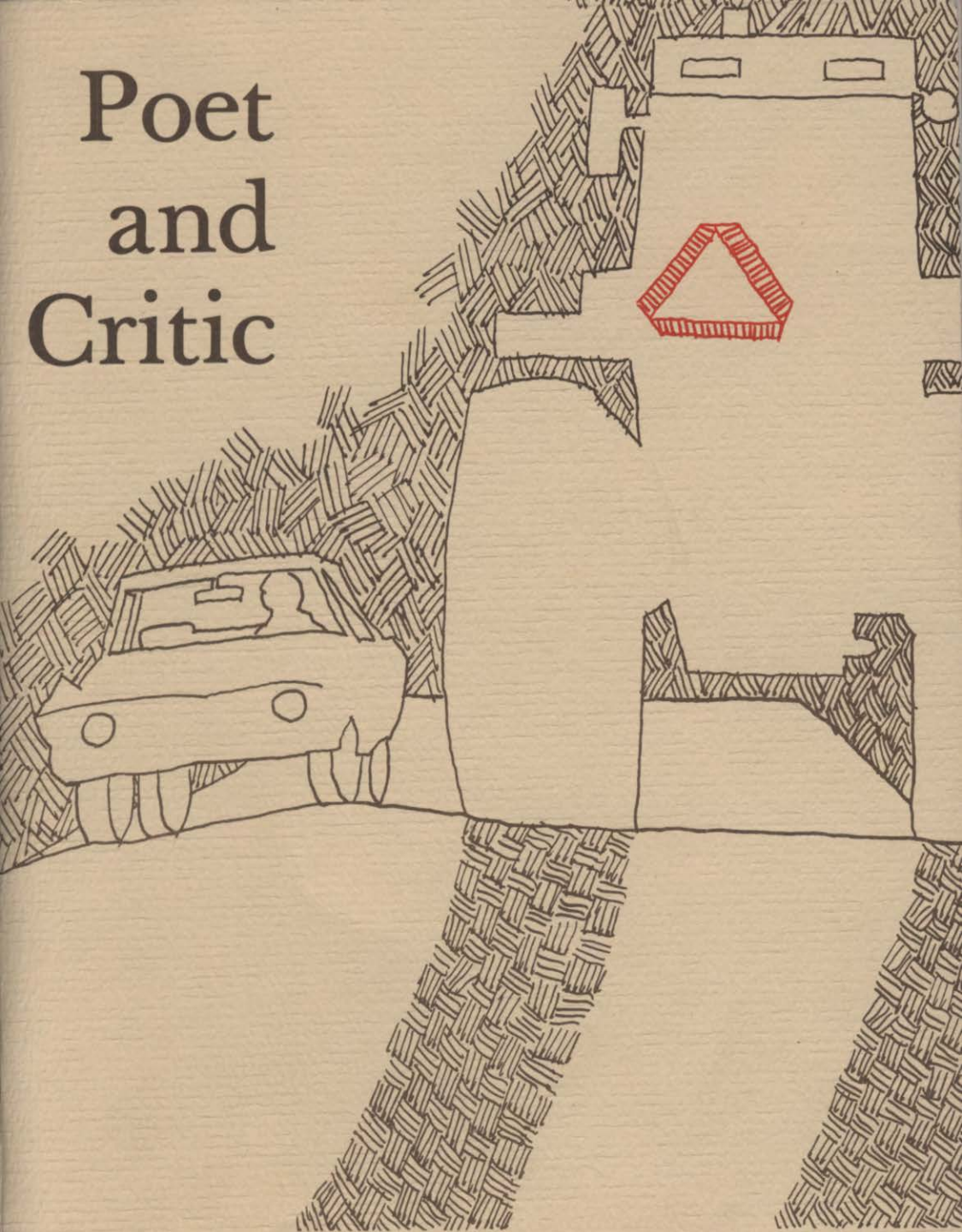
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# Poet and Critic

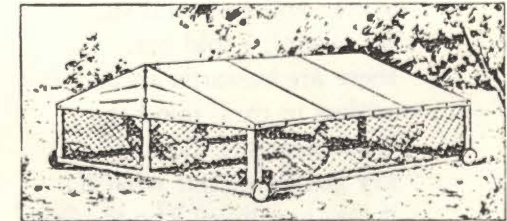


JAMES HEARST

### TAKING THE BULL TO WATER

The herd bull leaves his stall  
to do his duty by his wives  
(as some men do not) and goes  
with me twice a day to the  
tank for water. Tight curls  
of hair pack the wide space  
between his eyes which seem  
to regard me with an amiable  
but stupid stare. But his  
polished horns warn me to  
have the beast in him respect  
the beast in me. I crowd his neck  
behind the horns to untie  
his halter rope, then snap  
the leading stick to the ring  
in his nose. He accepts my gestures  
without protest and follows me  
with heavy steps. I walk backward  
all the way, facing him, the  
halter rope over my shoulder  
the leading stick in both hands.  
If he would hook at me I have him  
where it hurts, the ring he wears  
in a tender nose. At the tank  
I climb up on a post,  
unsnap the stick while he  
sucks up water. He looks up  
drops dripping from his muzzle.  
I throw a half hitch around  
the gate post until I snap  
the stick in his ring. We  
return, paired as before, he advances,  
I retreat one step at a time.  
Our moment comes when I must

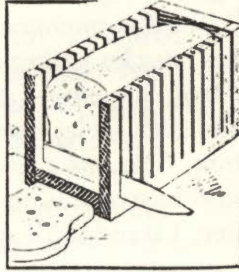
lift my foot high enough to  
clear the barn door sill and  
not trip and fall. I can't read  
his shaggy thoughts but he knows  
as well as I this movement counts.  
I feel his muscles gather and  
a push from his bowed neck.  
I jerk the stick to let him know  
I feel him. (We lost a neighbor  
once who missed this step.)  
We enter, I stand aside not to be  
caught between him and the manger.  
I tie the rope, unsnap the stick,  
pat his back. He's relaxed now too  
and munches hay. I play the game  
my way, he gets a drink, I keep my skin,  
to date we have not changed the rules,  
he waits the day of an exception.



A Movable Chicken Coop may be Pushed about the  
Lawn So That the Grass will be Eaten  
Off Uniformly



JAMES HEARST



### NOT THE LAST GOODBYE

Hat askew, coat open,  
purse on one arm, car keys  
in hand, she scans the  
grocery list and bumps  
into the door. She backs up,  
kicks it open, steams into  
the garage. I hear the car  
grumble, cough, then roar.  
The hand of the kitchen  
clock zip zips from second  
to second, and the morning  
grows. I retreat to my study,  
open and shut drawers, hear  
the house empty itself of  
voices and rush and stir.  
Be careful, I told her,  
there are bastards abroad  
witless in cars, mind the  
cross streets. I did not  
say goodbye. But what if  
it was goodbye? The thought  
so skewered me I did not turn  
a page until she returned.

✓  
*JAMES HEARST*

NOT REALLY A QUARREL

Granted we slept well and  
ate breakfast together,  
the sky has not lost color  
nor the sun its light,  
birds seem busy at their  
feeding and indoors the rooms  
keep order, no failure  
of light or heat, faucets  
do not leak and no real quarrel  
worked up a storm. But some  
insistence on your side  
made you scrub the sink  
with sudden vigor and I  
skimmed the paper without  
reading the news. Trapped in  
a disagreement we could not  
define, we simmered in a  
half angry, half apologetic mood.  
After all these years together  
it is still hard for one of  
us to say, I was mistaken.

V

JAMES HEARST

THE WEED CUTTER

Earth soaked by a thunderstorm  
excused us from fieldwork on a  
hot muggy June morning. Time  
to cut weeds in the fence rows.  
"Son of a bitch," I said, weary  
with sixteen years. Corn taller  
than my head kept off the breeze,  
gnats swarmed over my sweaty  
face. I hung my shirt on a  
fence post, whetstone in my  
hip pocket to sharpen the scythe,  
a jug of drinking water hidden  
under grass to keep it cool.  
Large hemp stalks tough as leather  
I named for people I disliked  
and whacked away. The neighbor's  
stupid cows stared at me across  
the fence where the blade of  
my scythe caught and nearly tore  
my arms loose. Who would want  
to be a farmer and work his ass off  
on a day like this? Resentment  
poured into my muscle but a nap  
in the shadowy cornfield never  
tempted me. As in a game  
to win I swung the scythe and  
conscience heavy with father's  
orders kept the score.

✓

JAMES HEARST

## BALANCE SHEET

From my father's family I inherit  
a long face and a need for facts,  
on my mother's side a delight in  
tales where the hero slays the dragon.  
The mirror repeats my age and shows  
the wrinkles of my discontent.  
I am tangled in webs of habit.  
I eat an apple each day, dress up  
on Sunday, make love at full moon,  
share as much as I borrow, brush  
my teeth before I read the headlines,  
drink my coffee black with toast.  
My files bulge with notes from  
committee meetings, I keep a  
running account of my expenses.  
This stencil for living stamps my work  
but I move with purpose. No one  
on either side of the family  
ever made a journey just to see  
the sights.



Effective Method of Burning Stumps: An Injection  
of Saltpeter Enables the Fire to Creep to the Ends  
of the Roots, Until They are All Consumed